IO5 – Health Literacy Toolkit with Policy & Practice Recommendations

Executive Summary

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Introduction to the iWell Project

The iWell project – Enhancing the Digital and Social Well-being in Schools - is an Erasmus+ project that develops effective tools for primary school students, aged 6-12 years old, to support them to develop a healthy online life and boost their social well-being. It aims to develop the necessary competences of primary school teachers, in teaching life skills and digital literacy skills for online safety and social well-being, and eventually of primary school students with regards to the safe and healthy use of any digital media, to create healthy and active citizens of the future.

Nowadays, students' well-being in European schools has become a challenge for numerous teachers to confront, partly due to the needs of the new digital world. A gap that directly arises from this is to develop effective tools for students to have a healthy online life (JRC, 2020). Specifically, the European Commission pays attention to the online safety and digital wellbeing of young people. According to the Digital Agenda for Europe, actions and policies of the EU should focus on maximising the benefits that the digital era can yield by 2020. Significantly, all educators and school leaders should acquire the necessary skills to teach their students to benefit the most of this great potential that is provided to them (Eurydice, 2018) and try to enhance their health and digital literacy skills. However, there is substantial research evidence, which suggests that young people do not have the appropriate skills that a person needs in the new digital world (European Commission, 2015). Any form of misuse of the internet could jeopardise the well-being of students, as well as their success at school (OECD,

2017). In addition, according to the PIAAC survey, there is an alarming need to develop the life skills of young people to increase their well-being.

With an emphasis on the health and social well-being of students, the project pays attention on the development of their health literacy skills and the creation of supportive environments to enable them to control the determinants of their health and "improve their health".

The iWell project focuses on empowering primary school students, aged 6 – 12, to lead a healthy online life and boost their social well-being. Better levels of health are pivotal to reach well-being and happiness, as there is scientific evidence supporting that healthier populations tend to live longer and have a better rate of development (WHO, 2015).

iWell Health Literacy Toolkit with Policy & Practice Recommendations Report – An Introduction

The purpose of the iWell Health Literacy Toolkit with Policy and Practice Recommendations is to present a collection of lessons learned, best practices and examples and recommendations targeted at both policy and practitioner level in Europe, that is informed through project partners' collective experience of developing and delivering the iWell project. Through this report, our intention is to present the findings and outcomes of the research and evaluation activities that were undertaken in each partner country to capture the lived experiences of educators and education stakeholders who have been engaged throughout the development and delivery of this project; and to ensure

that their voices and experiences are included in forming the policy recommendations that are based on our collective experience of implementing this project. As such, this Policy Recommendations Report presents findings from a consultation that was undertaken with teachers and education stakeholders who participated in the project in each country, educators who supported the project in each country and project partners who have been engaged in the project from the beginning. This Paper has been drafted to present the collective findings from these consultations and to present the European recommendations from our collaborative work.

In addition, partners have been asked to complete a SWOT analysis template to assess and share the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats that were apparent during their implementation activities. Finally, based on their national piloting implementations, all partners have been asked to author a case study to present their approach to implementing the iWell training package in schools, and to assess the effectiveness of this approach.

Through developing this report, our aim has to engage primary school teachers and education stakeholders that are interested in health education who have been engaged in the iWell project from across Europe in the policy debate regarding how digital and social well-being is taught in primary schools in Europe; and to present the lessons we have learned through piloting the iWell training package in primary schools in the six partners in the five partner countries represented in this consortium, namely: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Ireland.

This Executive Summary presents an overview of our findings form the research process, and some key insights from project partners. The full Policy and Practice Recommendations Report with detailed overview of the focus group sessions held in each country, with the national case studies and with policy and practice recommendations per partner country is available on the project website: https://iwellproject.eu/resources/

To begin with reviewing our work in iWell, we will start by providing some insights from partners with an overview of the feedback received from teachers and school stakeholders engaged in the project, and some information on the type of impact we have achieved in partner countries, thanks to iWell.

Feedback from the Participants

Throughout the iWell project, partner organisations have been collaborating with primary school communities, teachers, education psychologists and health education professionals to pilot, test and refine our iWell training package, to support the development of digital, social and emotional well-being resources for primary schools. Based on our piloting activities, we have received the following feedback from teachers engaged in this project:

- Positive moments of the project:
  - The digital resources in IO3 – Mini games and IO4 – MOOCs that covered three sub-areas of well-being, i.e., the digital, the social and the emotional well-being.

- o Micro-learning as a new learning context that provides the possibility to users to learn in brief about any topic
- o Self-directed learning as a new trend, allowing the user to learn at own time and pace, enjoy learning and experience self-assessment.
- o The project's cycle ended with Policy Recommendations.
- Teachers' reactions to the iWell project in general were highly positive. The Mini Games were appreciated as both useful and funny.
- The learning materials in the MOOC were described as clear, coherent, and applicable, although not enough attention-grabbing.
- The project was described as engaging, innovative, useful, inspirational.
- The teachers found the training material very useful for its practical activities easily replicable in classroom. They find it rich of interesting contents and evaluate it positively also for the videos and different learning online tools.

From these comments we gain a snapshot of the positive implementation of the iWell training package, and of the positive influence that projects like iWell can have on school communities.

Impact of iWell in Schools

To support the development of this Executive Summary, partners were asked to reflect on the impact that iWell has achieved in their countries, and to share this impact with us. This is an overview of the impacts achieved by the iWell team:

- Raising awareness on social emotional and digital well-being, by introducing them to innovative, useful and engagement content and tools.
- The staff of these schools expectedly realized the need to introduce such training. They were throughout confident and willing to work on the topics we provided. The students were happy to do something different.
- We managed to raise awareness on the topics in meaningful and fun ways.
- After the successful piloting of training materials, the participating teachers disseminated the project and recruited more teachers from their school and welcomed us to implement the piloting of the games.
- We were able to address young students directly and engage them in a conversation about their well-being. They were so animated and inspired to learn because of the approach of iWell – using the mini games. We left the piloting session with the impression that we had made a lasting impact on the students, teachers and schools.

From this summary, it is clear that there is a value to be had to investing in the iWell project approach, and to addressing well-being with young learners in primary schools.

Advice to other Educators – Practice Recommendations

Based on our experience of supporting schools in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, and Ireland to apply the iWell training package to enhance how digital, social, and emotional well-being is addressed in their primary school curricula, we have prepared the following practice recommendations to other education stakeholders or schools, not directly involved in iWell, but who may be interested in using these resources in the future:

1. Similarly, to how our own training was and based on what worked well for our case, I would recommend self- and group-reflection, since several sub-topics tackled may be new (e.g., FOMO, online dangers, etc.)
2. I would encourage open discussions, where emphasis will not be on didacticism in a judgemental tone, but sharing, exchanging, building trust, and critically reviewing.
3. I would recommend to select the resources based on the learners' needs in order for them to be useful and engaging.
4. Make learners understand that they need to learn about well-being for their own sake – it is not that they learn it by obligation.
5. Plan for enough time to test all the resources and games properly.
6. To take the time to go through all the activities, all the tools included in the training materials. But also, to start and facilitate debates on the topics covered.
7. Engage parents in discussing well-being, by setting the mini games as a homework task. It is important that parents are

involved in knowing what their children are learning about well-being.

8. Start by asking students what they know about well-being and if they can define it, then the teacher will know how best to approach the topic and which level is relevant for the students.

Policy Recommendations and Lessons Learned

The following section presents the final Policy and Practice Recommendations that were collected, summarised, and validated through this lengthy research and evaluation process.

From our work in developing and delivering this project with these stakeholders, we have learned that:

1. Digital well-being is highly important nowadays and attempts to address it in the classroom should not de-contextualise and detach it from emotional and social well-being.

2. Teachers need to be constantly updated regarding digital trends in education and upgrade/ advance their skills constantly. Micro-learning (see iWell IO4), mini-games (see iWell IO3), MOOCS (see iWell IO4) may enhance, self-directed learning (see iWell IO3 and IO$) and self-directed learning skills that become must in the digital era.

3. Digital resources that are inspiring and useful, leading to leaders' (of any age) engagement become a must in approaching topics as such.

4. You need to be aware of the target group's online habits, to deliver the knowledge in the most appropriate way.
5. Elements of fun need to be brought into the teaching process, emphasizing the unconventional and making it different from the other subjects.
6. Students need to realize how much they will gain from this training and how much they will enjoy technology when they use it properly.
7. It is essential to explore the emotional sphere of inside the classroom. Connecting with students' emotions bring them closer and create a safer and inclusive environment.
8. Digital wellbeing must be considered inside school. Students do not normally use their digital devices at school, so teachers tend to leave the issue for the families to deal with. However, the use they make of the digital devices at home or outside school, affect them and their behaviour.

Based on our experience of delivering this project, and addressing the topic of well-being, we are also in the position now, as project partners, to put forward our summary recommendations for policymakers, and decisionmakers, working in the primary education or health education sectors:

1. Expertise is needed in the fields of emotional, social, and digital well-being. The expert experience and eye will make sure that processes and results will be proper, useful and of high quality. This involves anything from programmes designed, resources developed to policymaking.

2. Innovative, engaging, inspiring, needs-based, practical, and useful resources, especially digitally, are needed in order to approach topics as such in school, at home and in society.
3. Adoption of such activity at state level is important in two ways - first, the knowledge and skills provided by the project will be promoted more widely across the country and second, with government support, the project activities can be scaled up both in number and effectiveness.
4. The implementation in schools requires not only skilled personnel and not only new equipment, but also that these personnel should be trained to operate this equipment.
5. Some European school's system requires some changes – they are entirely based on traditional school curricula that aim at passing traditional knowledge, focusing on specific subject-learning. The schools focus on passing general knowledge (to know), not on developing life-skills, emotional intelligence (to know-how).
6. Teachers need more freedom to explore alternative educational paths.
7. Teachers must be trained to explore and know how to deal with their emotion and well-being.
8. Significant good can come from investing in youth well-being from a young age, and giving children the tools, they need to thrive in our digital world.

Conclusion

The European Commission pays attention to the online safety and digital wellbeing of young people. According to the Digital Agenda for Europe, actions and policies of the EU should focus on maximising the benefits that the digital era can yield by 2020. Significantly, all educators and school leaders should acquire the necessary skills to teach their students to benefit the most of this great potential that is provided to them (Eurydice, 2018) and try to enhance their health and digital literacy skills. However, there is substantial research evidence, which suggests that young people do not have the appropriate skills that a person needs in the new digital world (European Commission, 2015). Any form of misuse of the internet could jeopardise the well-being of students, as well as their success at school (OECD, 2017). In addition, according to the PIAAC survey, there is an alarming need to develop the life skills of young people to increase their well-being.

At present, learning about the digital world is a process that takes place among peers and mainly concentrates on entertainment. Scientific data indicates that young people preferred to use the internet for online games and to visit social networking websites. A prevalent concern is expressed among the EU member states with regards to the use of the internet and the children's online safety and digital wellbeing. Specifically, research indicated that the inappropriate use of internet resulted in behavioural changes of young people, such as the increase of solitude and the need of avoiding other people's company to stay alone to surf the internet (Eurostat, 2015). Furthermore, many young people were unable to handle cases of being exposed to inappropriate online content that resulted in stress and/or aggression. This is the context

within which the iWell project is presented. The project has been effective in it's approach to supporting teachers and school communities to address the digital, social and emotional well-being of pupils, during their formative years in primary school. Through this project, we have been able to develop and pilot a series of educational resources that will support teachers and school stakeholders, such as counsellors and psychologists, to address the topic of well-being in a holistic was in the primary school curriculum.

Through the research process to inform the development of this Policy and Practice recommendations report, we have learned a lot from teachers and education stakeholders who participated in this project about the impact that this project has had on them, and how it has impacted their schools. We would like to take this opportunity to thank these individuals and schools for their participation in this project, for their commitment to addressing well-being and for taking the time to share their perspectives with us so that we can author this report.